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OXCART IDEALIST

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30 June 1964

MEMORANDUM FOR: Deputy Director for Science and Technology

SUBJECT : Eventual Utilization of OXCART as a Covert Collection Vehicle

1. Periodically there arises the question whether or not OXCART will ever be used as a covert vehicle on a plausibly deniable basis, particularly over China and the Soviet Union. Certainly if an aircraft is shot down or otherwise falls into unfriendly hands, there could be no plausible deniability either as to ownership or intent. We could, of course, in the absence of an accident continue to deny that overflights had occurred, regardless of how much screaming might be done by the other people who would be fully knowledgeable as the result of radar intercept.

2. Thinking along the foregoing lines then the question arises as why we should attempt to be so deeply covert and deeply clandestine in the operation. Does it make any difference whether the aircraft is piloted by a civilian or a military man? Does it make any difference whether the aircraft has military insignia or "research" insignia? Does it make any difference whether the missions are operated by the CIA or by the Air Forces?

3. The one asset the Agency has which I do not think the military can duplicate is the ability to plan and conduct such operations on a "need-to-know" basis and with maximum security. We can get in and out with perhaps one tenth the fanfare that the military would generate. The only asset here, however, is an increased protection to the mission itself, and a greater facility in denying overflights even though they have in fact occurred.

4. What I would like you to do is to put some people thinking about this and working up the pros and cons of the matter. I need some talking points when the type of thinking I have put forward above is brought up in discussions I periodically get involved in.

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18 JUL 1964

MEMORANDUM FOR: Deputy Director of Central Intelligence

SUBJECT: Eventual Utilization of OXCART as a Covert
Collection Vehicle

REFERENCE: BYE 4569-64 dated 30 June 1964

1. The referenced memorandum poses certain questions concerning the eventual utilization of the OXCART vehicle as a covert collection vehicle. Specifically, it asks whether there is, in fact, any significant difference whether the aircraft is piloted by a civilian or a military man, and does it make any difference whether the missions are operated by the CIA or by the Air Force.

2. In seeking an answer to the questions therein raised, we must necessarily lean heavily on the experience we have derived from the U-2 program. It must be assumed that the political philosophy which guided the evolution of U-2 operational concepts, as well as program management, has not altered significantly with the passage of time.

3. As you will recall, one of the basic factors upon which political approval rested when U-2 overflights of the USSR were first undertaken in 1956 was our ability to present to the highest political authority the means whereby this vital intelligence might be collected without placing the United States in a posture wherein the USSR could accuse the United States of an act of pure military aggression. Obviously, a very fundamental ingredient in achieving this capability was the irrefutable fact that the pilot was a civilian employee of an Agency whose business was illegal espionage.

4. In the years since we began covert overflights of denied territory, there has evolved in the minds of responsible political authorities an accepted modus operandi applicable to this type of activity, that is,

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that if the United States was not willing to acknowledge publicly the penetration of denied air space by military forces, then that mission must be performed by the CIA. This policy has been reaffirmed on several occasions in the intervening years by the USIB, the Special Group and higher authority.

5. In essence, the logical conclusion depends mainly on the question of covert versus overt operations, and the political ramifications that pertain to each type of operation. We are of the opinion that once you inject the military element, i. e., an Air Force pilot, the operation is no longer a truly covert collection effort but rather a military activity which should properly be conducted by the appropriate military element. It is further believed that CIA civilian sponsorship clearly identifies the mission as non-aggressive and permits more plausible description of its nature as defensive rather than offensive. Military association could be exploited by the opposition as an example of the Pentagon's potential for undertaking military adventures of an aggressive nature with or without consent of political authority. In addition, CIA controls no nuclear weapons, which rules out any propaganda suggestion that an irrational act by some subordinate commander might precipitate a nuclear war.

6. In a very practical sense, we have learned from experience that CIA sponsorship in the case of a protest of a successful overflight permits the U. S. military commander in the area to truthfully state, after investigation, that no military aircraft were involved and to deny any knowledge of the flight without fear of subsequent exposure.

7. The rationale which dictates the use of civilian CIA pilots for overflights of denied areas leads directly to the question of program management of covert collection activities. There appears to be no practical means of severing operational control of such programs from the management and developmental aspects of the activity. It would serve no purpose to dwell on the detailed security measures which have been evolved by the Agency to protect these operations from public exposure. It is equally as certain that the Air Force cannot duplicate these procedures which are uniquely associated with Agency operations.

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As you have noted in the referenced memorandum, these rather complex, but essential, procedures contribute materially to increased protection of the mission itself, and a greater facility in denying overflights even though they have in fact occurred.

8. In examining the background of U-2 program planning, which in large measure would be projected into the OXCART program, there are a number of procedures which have been established by the Agency to further the objectives and effectiveness of the project. For example, CIA has over the years developed a highly sophisticated analysis and personal evaluation program for selection of psychologically adapted individuals to perform overflights. It has also conceived and implemented a sound program for indoctrination and psychological preparation of the individual in event of capture in these very unique circumstances. It is doubtful that the Air Force could effectively duplicate these programs. CIA also takes stringent measures to compartment and limit knowledge of the individuals as soon as they join the program. Military data available to a military pilot on active duty with the Air Force probably could not be limited in this same manner and would be subject to compromise in the event of capture.

9. From the operational standpoint, in eight years of CIA management and control of U-2 overflights of denied areas in all parts of the world (more than 400 overflights of approximately 30 denied countries) there has been only one incident which has resulted in genuine embarrassment to the United States Government, this being the loss of a U-2 over the Soviet Union in May of 1960. This rather remarkable record was not established by happenstance; rather it is the product of the entire concept of the CIA operation including meticulous security, judicious mission planning and timing, specialized maintenance by expert contractor personnel on long-term assignment, careful development of plausible cover stories and detailed contingency planning (including world-wide coordination and authentic documentation) to eliminate or minimize the harmful affects of an incident or mishap.

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10. In this context, it should be recorded that although CIA has been criticized on occasion for exercising restraint in committing its assets to hazardous overflights of questionable value and of dubious potential success, this very restraint has been one of the most significant contributions to the unexpectedly prolonged life of the program. The "shotgun and saturation" approach to overflight reconnaissance which customarily has been associated with Air Force endeavors in this field can never successfully be employed in any covert reconnaissance program. The record is quite clear on this point, but despite some enlightening experiences, such as the ill-fated BLACK KNIGHT program, which expired from over-exposure and unwarranted operational enthusiasm within 24 hours of its first operation, the Air Force has failed to absorb this fact of reconnaissance life and it appears doubtful that it ever will. (7)

11. The picture is not complete without some reference to accomplishments in the field of aircraft and systems improvement and development. It should be noted that in the eight years since the U-2 became operational there have been many innovations to improve the performance, versatility and defensive capability of the U-2, among them the introduction of the J-75 engine, in-flight refueling, the carrier configuration, countermeasures systems such as the Systems 9 and 12, Birdwatcher, improved camera systems, improved eject system and personal equipment, etc. In every instance these innovations and improvements were initiated and developed by CIA. Conversely, the Air Force has contributed virtually nothing to the improvement of the aircraft during these years, and, in fact, has in most instances failed to take advantage of the developments and modifications that were conceived and consummated by the Agency. The Air Force today is flying essentially the same limited capability U-2's that were introduced eight years ago.

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12. Because of this lack of foresight and initiative on the part of the military, when situations have arisen which required utilization of the more sophisticated capabilities of the Agency-owned aircraft, we have been forced to deplete our assets and forego our high priority commitments in order to provide to the Air Force the necessary equipment to accomplish its objectives.

13. The foregoing exposition of the considerations encompassed in the two ostensibly uncomplex questions posed in the referenced memorandum may appear to be an "over-kill" of the problem, however, when we confront the political question of military versus CIA pilots, a chain reaction occurs which inevitably leads to examination of program management, operational control and developmental accomplishments. Such examination has led us to the conclusion that the OXCART program, if it is ever to be politically acceptable and successfully employed for covert reconnaissance, must be under the operational control of the CIA and must utilize civilian CIA pilots.



ALBERT D. WHEELON
Deputy Director
for
Science and Technology

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